Assessment and Feedback Principles

Purpose

Within the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Strategy, a key element of strategic objective two is “ensuring that assessment and feedback strategies support student learning/success”. In addition, the Newcastle Offer document has as expectations that all students will:

- Have transparent and clear information about what is being assessed, how and why
- Be assessed formatively and summatively, in a range of ways that supports their learning across the programme
- Receive timely and useful feedback for all assessments (including examinations) that feeds forward into improvement of performance

The Principles take these objectives as their starting point and seek to provide a framework for assessment and feedback which should be applied across the University.

It is anticipated that the principles will be used in three ways:

- When developing and writing policy,
- When designing, writing and reviewing assessment for programmes, stages and modules,
- To share with students and staff through appropriate mechanisms, supporting a collective understanding of the purposes of assessment and feedback and how they develop and support learning.

The principles are first described succinctly, at a high level, before a second section which considers the practical application and implementation of the principles for Schools and disciplines, and how their assessment and feedback practices could be benchmarked against the principles. It is envisaged that this second section will be held electronically and added to with examples of good practice, (such as case studies developed from Innovation Fund projects) for use as a resource by colleagues.

Scope

It is appropriate to note that the document refers to the importance of the principles being considered at a programme as well as a module (or equivalent) level. Whilst acknowledging that the vast majority of
assessment is at the module level, evidence suggests the value of taking a programme wide view. At its most simple, a programme view can pick up instances of ‘bunching’ of assessment, note the range of assessment methods in use, and confirm that all programme learning outcomes are covered.

In developing the principles one key concern has been to recognise the importance of flexibility to accommodate disciplinary differences. It is therefore expected that these principles will be contextualised within the disciplines and the second section will to contain specific examples drawn from all Faculties.

The principles are not specific to any level of study and can be used across the range of qualifications offered at Newcastle University, undergraduate and postgraduate, with contextualisation.

The AWG recognised the many occurrences of excellent practice across the University and the principles have been developed using this and the best information and practice from across the sector; they have benefitted from the input of many colleagues internally and externally and from the advice provided by Professor David Nicol.

Principles

**Principle 1** Assessment and feedback are integral to supporting effective student learning.

Assessment guides learning and provides a key tool for judging performance and the level of attainment, both to the student through formative assessment and feedback and to the institution and external stakeholders through summative assessment.

For many students the assessment requirements of a programme define the curriculum. Well thought out and considered assessment and feedback can be a vital tool in significantly influencing student learning through guiding a student’s study practices and rewarding the student for developing the skills, knowledge and abilities valued by the University.

A key role for assessment and feedback is in supporting the student to become a more self-reflective learner, who is able to self assess, peer assess and use these outcomes in conjunction with assessment feedback to improve their performance.

The policies and processes of assessment and feedback will be transparent to internal and external staff and students.

Assessment and feedback should be appropriate to the outcome and the year/level of the student and should allow the student to demonstrate their performance against criteria and their developing knowledge and skills.
**Principle 2** Effective and efficient assessment and feedback must be central to the curriculum design process.

In order to maximise the benefits to students and staff from effective and efficient assessment, the development of assessment and feedback should be a core part of the module or course, and programme.

Assessment and feedback should relate clearly and directly to programme and module (or equivalent) aims and learning outcomes. Assessment tasks should encourage effective student learning and should require students to engage with the subject material through spending ‘time and effort’ on challenging learning tasks.

Effective assessment results where programmes ensure that proper consideration is given to assessment across the breadth of the programme, ensuring the amount of assessment is consistent with a reliable and valid achievement profile.

Efficient assessment results where assessments are scheduled carefully during the academic year and the volume of work required does not overload staff or students at any one time.

**Principle 3** Assessment should be valid, reliable and consistent.

This principle requires assessment tasks to be chosen carefully to ensure they assess the outcomes specified and for information about assessment tasks to be clear, explicit, accurate and timely. Advice should also make explicit the requirements of assessment tasks for the benefit of staff, externals and students. The standards required of students should reflect the stage of the programme.

Valid assessments are ones that measure all or part of the stated outcomes of the module, course or programme. A valid form of assessment is one which, as far as possible, measures what it is supposed to measure. For example, it does not assess memory, when it is supposed to be assessing problem-solving (or vice versa).

Reliable assessment will produce the same (or very similar) results with a student or cohort of students if they were retested, meaning it is consistent in its methods and criteria.

It is recognised that absolute reliability and validity is not possible, but that assessments should aim to meet the highest standards possible.

**Principle 4** Opportunities for feedback and formative assessment will be included in all programmes.
Wherever possible students should have opportunities to receive feedback on their progress to date and have the opportunity to use that feedback to close any gap between current and desired performance in summative assessment. Good practice is for such opportunities to be present in all modules or equivalent.

Formative feedback can be delivered by staff or student peers; it can be written, electronic or verbal; individual or to a group. Specific formative tasks may be developed such as quizzes or short tests, or staff may incorporate feedback within their teaching activities.

In some modules (or equivalent) it may be appropriate that formative and summative assessment are combined eg a mid term assessment before a final end of semester summative assessment.

Programmes may wish to offer some form of diagnostic assessment at the beginning of particular modules or equivalent.

**Principle 5 Feedback should be high quality and timely**

High quality feedback is constructive and encourages self assessment, reflection and making judgements against criteria and standards; it helps students to self-correct and encourages motivation.

In particular, high quality feedback is distinguished by how it helps to clarify what the student’s current performance is against module (or equivalent) goals, criteria and standards; recognises and specifies the existing good practice of the student; and suggests possible strategies to enable the student to move towards the goals in areas where they are weak.

Feedback should both reflect performance on the specific piece of work and provide forward looking support for ongoing student learning.

It is recognised that students often lack the skills to assess their own work or that of others (self and peer assessment) and programmes should consider how best to provide suitable training for students to enable them to become more proficient in this area.

University standards on feedback turnaround should be met or exceeded and, where this is not possible, students should be informed as soon as possible of the delay and what steps are being taken to return their feedback to them.

**Principle 6 Forms and methods of assessment and feedback should be varied and appropriate.**

Programmes should take care to ensure a range of assessment and feedback methods are utilised across modules for both summative and formative assessment. Through using a variety of assessment tasks,
students should be encouraged to draw upon a range of skills and abilities, in addition to their discipline knowledge, to demonstrate their ability to apply their knowledge and understanding in new settings, both individually and in groups. This allows students to make specific links with the Graduate Skills Framework and the skills valued by employers.

Appropriate assessment is assessment which asks the right level of question (eg knowledge, application of knowledge, mastery of topic).

A range of assessment methods should be used to ensure students can demonstrate their mastery of their subject in a variety of ways.

Where new methods of assessment are introduced, such as peer assessment, OSCEs, online assessment, etc, it is vital students are given the opportunity to practice the form of the assessment to ensure any summative assessments is measuring their subject knowledge and skills rather than their proficiency in the assessment method.

**Principle 7** The University will provide the appropriate environment and resources to ensure staff and students are supported adequately.

The University will identify and support staff to undertake their role in assessment through access to generic and tailored workshops and individual pedagogic support provided by QuILT and the SDU. Relevant materials such as checklists, templates and tools will be made available to all Schools to use in devising their own support mechanisms. Schools are expected to encourage staff to take up development opportunities and share experiences with colleagues.

Support and advice will be made available to students through a variety of media and routes to ensure they have access to clear information about their assessment and feedback.

**Principle 8** Roles and responsibilities for both staff and students will be communicated clearly.

For assessment and feedback to work effectively both staff and students have clear roles and responsibilities to play and these will be set out in relevant documents.

See the Student Charter: [http://www.ncl.ac.uk/pre-arrival/regulations/charter.htm](http://www.ncl.ac.uk/pre-arrival/regulations/charter.htm)

The joint roles and responsibilities should be reinforced by staff when briefing students on assessment whether in class or through documentation.
**Principle 9** The University will monitor and evaluate assessment and feedback through appropriate methods.

The Implementation Group, on behalf of the University, will develop appropriate methods for the monitoring and evaluation of implementing these principles.

**Definitions**

Summative assessment – ‘assessment which provides a measure of achievement in respect of a student’s performance in relation to the intended learning outcomes’ (QAA). This definition sees summative assessment as the measurement of achievement and the subsequent gaining of certification, licence to practice or approval to proceed. Often summative assessment has a formative component.

Formative assessment – ‘assessment designed to provide learners with feedback on progress and inform development’ (QAA).

Feedback - feedback is information about how a student performed against a specified goal; it acknowledges success and points to how they could close the gap between their current performance and the goal.

Ongoing assessment and feedback – dialogue between students and staff, or students and peers, on the individual or group tasks they are undertaking in, for example, classes, seminars, labs or projects.
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<th>Principle</th>
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| **Principle 1** Assment and feedback are integral to supporting effective student learning. | By discussing and setting expectations for assessment and use of feedback from the viewpoints of students and staff at the beginning of a programme. This might include such aspects as how feedback is given (verbally, group sessions, via the vle), how to make use of feedback, expectations of use of sources in assessed work, and explaining what academic writing in the discipline means.  
Making use of assessment information in handbooks, vles such as Blackboard when discussing upcoming assessment with students.  
Ensuring the language used to describe assessment and feedback is clear, understandable and concise.  
Using exemplars drawn from excerpts of student work as case studies for guided discussion, to enable students achieve a better understanding of what is required to achieve a mark at a specific level within the module.  
Review assessment and feedback, at the programme level, on a regular basis to ensure it demonstrates progression from first to final year. Thus information for new students will include more detail on the layout and structure of the piece of assessment and the referencing requirements than that provided for those final year students who require a more detailed discussion of student research-led projects.  
Reviewing how the language used to describe assessment tasks or questions changes to reflect the intellectual skills required of each stage of study. |
| **Principle 2** Effective and efficient assessment and feedback must be central to the curriculum design process | Considering assessment and feedback at the same time as content and teaching as part of the programme and module design process, and aligning it to learning outcomes.  
Regularly reviewing assessment across a programme undertaken jointly by DPD and module leaders.  
Advice on programme and module design including writing learning outcomes and devising assessment can be accessed from QuILT or the SDU. |
| **Principle 3** Assessment should be valid, reliable and consistent | Reviewing assessments to make sure they address the module learning outcomes, ie does the assessment actually test achievement of the learning outcomes, whether knowledge or skills?  
Reviewing assessments to make sure they are reliable, that is the same student would achieve a similar result |
| Principle 4 Opportunities for feedback and formative assessment will be included in all programmes | Requiring students to undertake an initial assessment of their mathematical knowledge and use the results to suggest or require students to attend additional maths classes, or undertake directed self study of on-line materials, in order to ensure students have the necessary mathematical skills to undertake the programme of study.  
Using on line tests via university systems such as Blackboard, as formative assessment which once devised will roll forwards from year to year.  
Students work in small groups to solve problems, providing feedback to each other on the process. |
| Principle 5 Feedback should be consistently high quality and timely | Using feedback comment banks, supplemented with additional comments on the individual piece of work to provide more consistent feedback and reduce staff time.  
Providing generic feedback to students, either face to face or via the vle.  
Getting students to, with academic guidance, devise assessment criteria which can be used with low stakes assessment such as posters or presentations. Through this process they gain a deeper insight into the requirements of the assessment. Student assessment of the posters or presentations can be used as an additional element of the overall assessment. It is particularly helpful where students are asked to provide a mark, their justification for the mark, and helpful high quality feedback for the poster or presentation owner.  
Using on line assessment with feedback for part of a module assessment. |
| Principle 6 Forms and methods of assessment and feedback should be varied and appropriate | Within a programme year students are assessed through practical, written and skills-based measures including fieldwork, reports and presentations and examinations, all of which contribute towards the final mark for the module.  
Providing students with a clear opportunity to seek individual feedback on specified aspects of large pieces of work, such as a chapter of a project or dissertation.  
Encouraging students to work in ‘buddy groups’, or through a mentoring project to provide peer feedback for each other. |
| Principle 7 The University will provide the | A range of workshops for staff are available through the SDU, which deal with assessment issues. In addition staff can call upon the expertise of colleagues from Quilt and SDU, the resources they have developed, events they |
appropriate environment and resources to ensure staff and students are supported adequately

organise and their knowledge of good practice across the University and elsewhere in higher education.
SDU workshops [http://www.ncl.ac.uk/staffdev/workshops/categories.htm](http://www.ncl.ac.uk/staffdev/workshops/categories.htm)

Through consultation with the Union Society, events and information developed for and by students will be used to help raise student awareness of the purposes and uses of assessment and feedback and the expectations of these when undertaking university level study.

Through provision of resources LTDS will help to disseminate good practice case studies and examples to assist staff: [http://www.ncl.ac.uk/ltds/resources/](http://www.ncl.ac.uk/ltds/resources/)

| Principle 8 Roles and responsibilities for both staff and students will be communicated clearly | By discussing and setting expectations for assessment and use of feedback from the viewpoints of students and staff at the beginning of a programme. This might include such aspects as, how feedback is given (verbally, group sessions, via the vle), how to make use of feedback, expectations of use of sources in assessed work, and explaining what academic writing in the discipline means.

Making use of assessment information in handbooks, vles such as Blackboard when discussing upcoming assessment with students.
Ensuring the language used to describe assessment and feedback is clear, understandable and concise. |
| Principle 9 The University will monitor and evaluate assessment and feedback through appropriate methods | A key task for the proposed Implementation Group will be to determine the most appropriate and effective ways of monitoring and evaluating assessment and feedback. |